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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine how effective webbing--schematic representation of main ideas and supporting details--would be in helping students build bridges between their reading of a text and outlining the material in it. Subjects were 21 sixth grade students, who had been working on outlining and were familiar with its purpose and form. Twelve of the students worked with a fictional story, while the other nine worked with a nonfictional selection. In each of these conditions, subjects were divided into three groups. After hearing the passage read aloud, one group completed a partially complete outline of the story with no discussion of the content; one group was asked a series of oral questions to elicit the main ideas and supporting details before completing the outline; and one group was shown an outline web, then asked the same questions as the second group before completing the outline. The results showed that in both the fiction and nonfiction conditions, the group that completed the outline after discussion and after viewing the webbing did so considerably more accurately and in less time than did the other two groups. Besides webbing, other alternatives to the normal outline form can provide students with practice in organizing the material read in texts; these include pictorial, topical, charting and predication outlines. (Examples of these alternative techniques are included.) (HTH)

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Webbing: An Outlining Strategy

Kathy Everts Danielson

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WEBBING: AN OUTLINING STRATEGY

Outlining is often a difficult skill for students to comprehend and use successfully. Organizing main ideas and supporting details into a structured form can be a conceptual nightmare for many learners. There is a definite need for "outlining made simple" to reduce the difficulty of such an abstract thinking task.

Since the outline itself is a "graphic representation of the ladder of abstraction" (Hoffler, 1983), then ideally these abstractions can be visually displayed to illustrate the concepts necessary in forming an outline. Webbing serves as this visual link between the text and the outline.

Webbing is a way of organizing material visually through the use of related connections. For instance, in the outlining mode, a web would look like Figure 1.

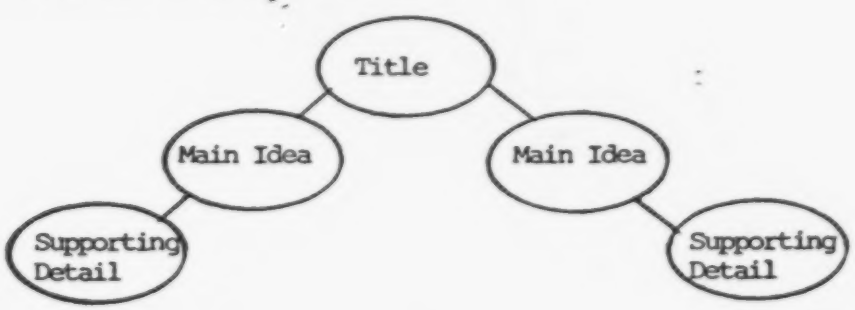


Figure 1.

Webbing has been promoted in a variety of arenas. Cleland (1981) proposed the use of episodic, inductive, and emotional webbing to promote comprehension of literature. Freedman and Reynolds (1980) showed how webbing could be used to enrich basal reading lessons.

This article will suggest that webbing can also be used successfully within outlining.

The underlying premise necessary for developing outlining skills is the ability to retain and process information. This knowledge is dependent upon "the amount of attention devoted to a stimulus and the processing time available" (Craik and Lockhart, 1972). Reading the text and then filling out an outline that organizes the material is often difficult to do because the stimulus or text is often written in abstract form. That is, to complete an outline of the material, some organization patterns must be processed by the reader. Webbing can serve as the bridge to accomplishing this analysis and processing. It can also serve as the diagram of the main ideas and supporting details, much like the "graphic organizer" proposed by Barron (1969).

The purpose of the study reported here was to see how effective webbing would be as an aid to outlining. Subjects included twenty-one sixth grade students from an urban middle class elementary school. These students had been working on outlining and were familiar with its purpose and form. Twelve of these students worked with the fictional story, while the other nine students worked with the nonfictional selection. The researcher met with students on an individual basis. Each student was presented with a basic outline form. A fictional story, Dandelion by Don Freeman, was read to the twelve students. After the oral reading, the following procedure took place:

Group 1: Four of the students were instructed to finish a

partially completed outline of the story (see Figure 2) with no discussion of the content.

Group 2: Four other students were asked a series of oral questions intended to elicit the main ideas and supporting details necessary to complete the outline (see Figure 3). The outline (Figure 2) was then given to the students for their completion.

Group 3: The final four students were shown an outline web (see Figure 4). The sequential elements of the story were examined as each oval was revealed to the students after they answered the same questions given to Group 2 (Figure 3). At the end of the discussion, the entire web was visible to the students. They were then given the outline (Figure 2) to complete.

TITLE:

I. Dandelion gets an invitation in the mail.

II.

A.

1.

2.

3.

4.

B. Goes to the tailor.

1.

2.

3.

C.

1. Buys flowers

III.

A. Is not recognized

IV.

A. Wind makes him lose his cap and flowers.

B.

V. Dandelion returns to the party.

A.

Figure 2. Partially Completed Fiction Outline

Oral Questions:

1. What is the story about? (TITLE)
2. What happens first? (MAIN IDEA I.)
3. What happens next? (MAIN IDEA II.)
4. Where does he go first? (SUPPORTING DETAIL II.A.)
5. What four things does he have done to himself? (MORE DETAILS II.A. 1-4)
6. Where does he go next? (SUPPORTING DETAIL II.B)
7. What 3 things does he buy? (MORE DETAILS II. B. 1-3)
8. Where does he go next? (SUPPORTING DETAIL II.C.)
9. What does he buy there? (MORE DETAILS II.C. 1)
10. What happens next? (MAIN IDEA III.)
11. What is Miss Giraffe's response? (SUPPORTING DETAIL III.A.)
12. What happen next? (MAIN IDEA IV.)
13. What 2 weather factors effect him? (SUPPORTING DETAILS IV. A-B.)
14. What happens next? (MAIN IDEA V.)
15. How is he treated this time? (SUPPORTING DETAIL V.A.)

Figure 3. Questions For Fiction Groups 2 & 3

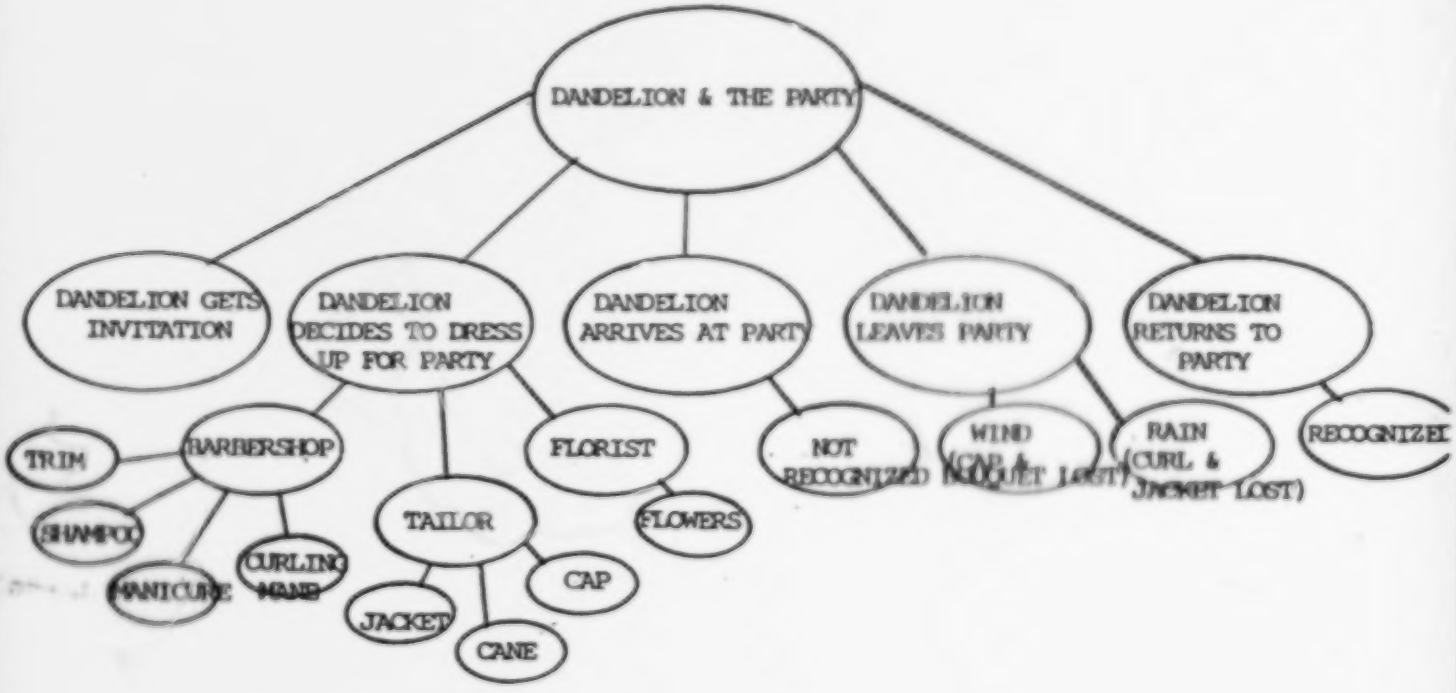


Figure 4. Fiction Web

The results of the three groups are as follows: Group 1 scored an accuracy average of 49% on the completed outline, while Group 2 scored a 72% accuracy average and Group 3 reached a 97% level of accuracy. In terms of time needed to complete the outline, Group 1 used an average of 8.5 minutes, Group 2 took 8.25 minutes, and Group 3 managed to finish their outline in an average of only 3.25 minutes. Those students in Group 3 who were able to both verbally and visually examine the sequential main ideas and supporting details were much more accurate than their peers who did not use the web. The students who verbally discussed the main ideas and supporting details (Group 2) did better than those not receiving any discussion (Group 1). In addition, the time needed to complete the outline was substantially lower for Group 3. Groups 1 and 2 were continually leafing through the book for visual aids or clues, while Group 3 simply used the web as their guide in the outlining completion.

A second part to the study, using a nonfiction selection, was conducted with the group of the nine remaining students. A section entitled "Life On A Farm" from Our Land (a Rand McNally Grade 3 social studies textbook) was read to the students. After this oral reading the following occurred:

Group 1: Three of the students were instructed to finish a partially completed outline of the article (see Figure 5) without discussion of the content.

Group 2: Three other students were asked a series of oral questions with the intention of pointing out the main idea

and supporting details (see Figure 6). The outline (Figure 5) was then given to them for their completion.

Group 3: The final three students were shown an outline web (see Figure 7). Again the sequential elements of the article were examined as each oval was revealed to the students upon completion of the oral questions asked (Figure 6). The entire web was visible to the students upon completion of the discussion. The students were then given the outline (Figure 5) to finish.

TITLE:

I.
  A.
  B. Fertilize
  C.
  D.
II. Summer - growing time
  A.
  B.
III.
  A. Vegetables and fruits are harvested
IV.
  A.
  B.
  C.
  D. Go to school and learn how to use soil.

Figure 5. Partially Completed Nonfiction Outline

Oral Questions:

1. What is this article about? (TITLE)
2. What is the first season and its purpose? (MAIN IDEA I.)
3. What is done first in the spring? (SUPPORTING DETAIL I.A.)
4. What is done next? (SUPPORTING DETAIL I.B.)
5. What is done next? (SUPPORTING DETAIL I.C.)
6. What is done next? (SUPPORTING DETAIL I.D.)
7. What is the next season and its purpose? (MAIN IDEA II.)
8. What is done in the summer? (SUPPORTING DETAIL II. A.)
9. What else? (SUPPORTING DETAIL II.B.)
10. What is the third season and its purpose? (MAIN IDEA III.)
11. What is done in the fall? (SUPPORTING DETAIL III.A.)
12. What is the fourth season and its purpose? (MAIN IDEA IV.)
13. What is done in the winter? (SUPPORTING DETAIL IV.A.)
14. What else? (SUPPORTING DETAIL IV.B.)
15. What else? (SUPPORTING DETAIL IV.C.)
16. What else? (SUPPORTING DETAIL IV.D.)

Figure 6. Questions For Nonfiction Groups 2 & 3

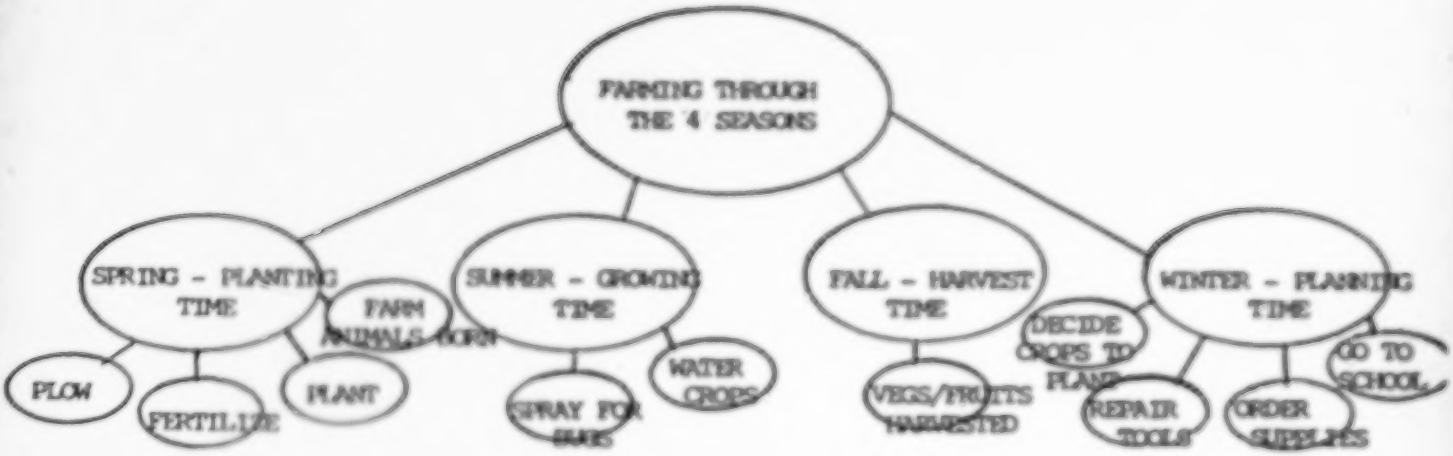


Figure 7. Nonfiction web

The results of this study are as follows: Group 1 scored an accuracy average of 56% on their outlines, while Group 2 had a 95% accuracy rate, and Group 3 accomplished a 100% accuracy average. The average time needed to complete the outlines was 4.75 for Group 1, and 3 minutes for both Group 2 and Group 3. Groups 2 and 3 did very well in terms of accuracy and in average completion time. Perhaps this was the result of the relative ease with which this particular section adapted to outline form. Nonfiction material often lends itself to a more natural transition to outline form and thus is usually used in the area of outline instruction.

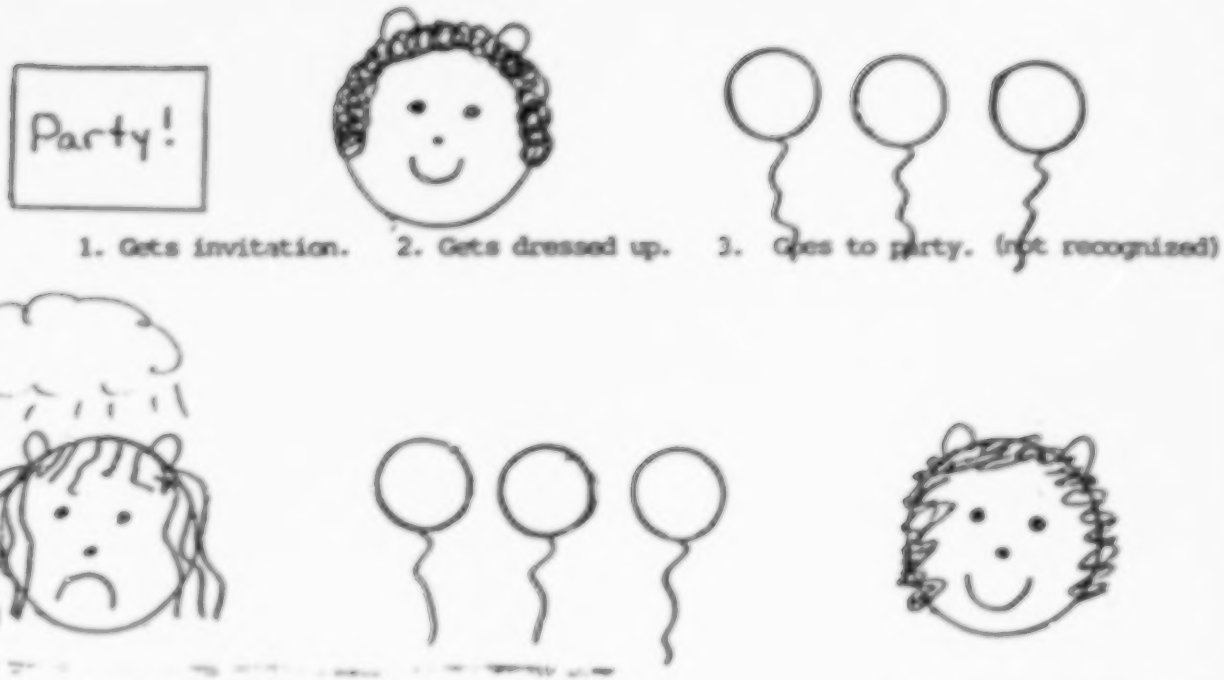
Even though the study was conducted within a small sample there appears to be some substantial improvements among students who used webbing as an aid for outlining - especially with the fiction selection. Perhaps initial outlining instruction could include a supplemental web to allow students to visualize the concept of main ideas and supporting details. The form of the outline would

follow directly the form of a web - with the large ovals containing the main ideas and the smaller cluster of ovals attached to a large oval illustrating the supporting details for that main idea. Such a graphic display, placed on an overhead projector or on the chalkboard, could help students understand the form of an outline and the parts necessary for its completion. Perhaps students could be encouraged to produce a web of a story or selection as the preliminary step in outlining. The students who received the web in this study heartily agreed that the web made outlining much easier and "more fun."

Webbing is a useful instructional device in the area of outlining. The relative ease of transition from web to outline form should help students improve their outlining skills and make outlining a more meaningful and attainable skill.

Besides webbing, other alternatives to the normal outline form provide students with practice in organizing the material read in texts. The following ideas are adapted from Giardano (1984).

In the primary grades pictorial outlines serve the purpose of an outline, especially for fiction selections. Students simply draw a sketch of some of the important incidents in the story and construct them in chronological order. For instance, a pictorial outline for Dandelion might look like Figure 8.



1. Gets invitation. 2. Gets dressed up. 3. Goes to party. (not recognized)

4. Rain and wind ruin hairdo. 5. Returns to party. 6. Is recognized!

Figure 8. Pictorial Outline

Topical outlines are very simple to make. A topic from the text is written on a piece of paper and the child writes down any sentences or even words that apply to that topic, based upon what has been read. For instance, for the "Life On A Farm" selection, a topical outline might appear as Figure 9.

Spring: -time for planting
-land is plowed
-fertiliser put in soil

Figure 9. Topical Outline

Charting outlines can be done in two different ways. One way

would resemble a time line. The important events of the story are plotted on a line in chronological order. For instance, for Dandelion, this chart might look like Figure 10.

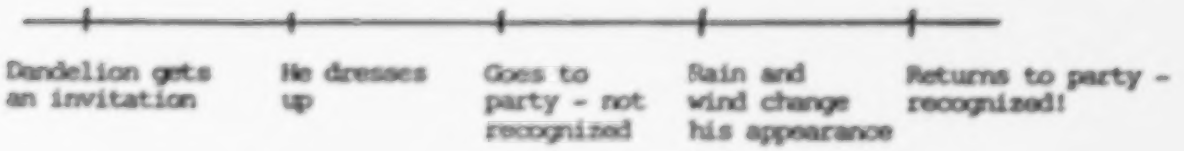

Dandelion gets an invitation
He dresses up
Goes to party - not recognized
Rain and wind change his appearance
Returns to party - recognized!

Figure 10. Charting - Time Line

Another charting outline is spatial in its arrangement. It shows the relationship of the setting to the action in the story. Again, using Dandelion, the chart would resemble Figure 11.

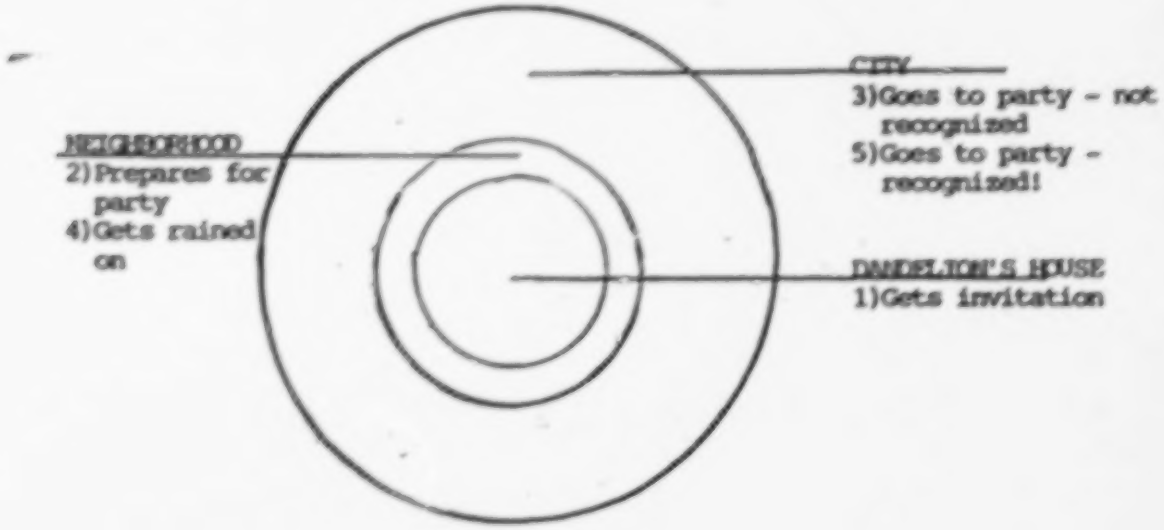


Figure 11. Charting - Spatial

A final outlining alternative is one involving predication. In this case, the major character is evaluated in terms of events s/he initiated and incidents that were caused by others. With Dandelion, this chart would take on the form of Figure 12. Here the events with arrows pointing out indicate events Dandelion initiated, while those with the arrows pointing in illustrate events that someone or something else controlled, or things that were done to Dandelion.

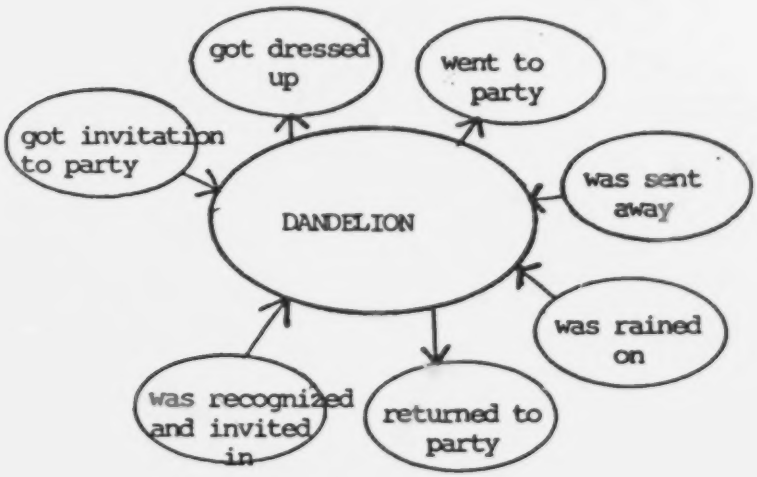


Figure 12. Predication

All of these alternatives to outlining, namely webbing, pictorial outlines, topical outlines, chronological charting, spatial charting, and predication, could provide students the necessary practice in organizing information from the text. Through continued practice of these types of processing, outlining would become more meaningful, more fun, and ultimately an easier skill to achieve.

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